The Arms Race Today: The special session reflected growing world concern over the arms race, which causes instability rather than security, impedes international co-operation and wastes resources urgently needed for development purposes.

World expenditures on military forces and armaments are estimated to have reached the level of about $400 billion a year. More and more countries on all continents are being drawn into the arms build-up, acquiring ever more sophisticated weaponry. Many developing countries are among those which have substantially increased their purchases of major weapons in recent years and the world arms trade is booming. Since 1945 millions have been killed by conventional weapons in scores of conflicts.

A main driving force of the arms race is the arms competition among the major military Powers, and its most dangerous aspect, threatening the survival of mankind, is the nuclear arms race. The expanding nuclear arsenals contain tens of thousands of nuclear weapons, with a total explosive power of more than 1 million Hiroshima bombs -- enough to destroy the world many times over.

The Final Document of the Assembly's special session warns: "Mankind is confronted with a choice: we must halt the arms race and proceed to disarmament or face annihilation".

Activities Proposed: At the special session and in the 1978 regular session, the Assembly called for a number of activities aimed at mobilizing public opinion in support of disarmament. The UN, Government and non-governmental organizations were urged to increase the dissemination of information on the arms race and efforts to halt it, and to develop programmes of education for disarmament and peace studies at all levels. Member States, the Assembly said, "should be encouraged to ensure a better flow of information with regard to the various aspects of disarmament to avoid dissemination of false and tendentious information concerning armaments".

Disarmament Week can help to create an international atmosphere conducive to practical disarmament measures. A model programme listing possible Disarmament Week activities (A/34/436) has been prepared at the Assembly's request. It includes the following suggestions:

Government Activities: The model programme suggests that Governments provide factual information to the public on arms expenditures, production and acquisition of weapons, and on their policies relating to efforts to end the arms race including their views on their own military establishments and expenditures. Disarmament Week would be an appropriate time for Governments to reaffirm support for disarmament; to ratify arms control agreements; to announce plans for reduction of military budgets or for discontinuance of weapons programmes; or to introduce peace studies in schools.

Other suggestions are that Governments consider establishing disarmament advisory committees to give citizens outside the government a voice in formulation of defence policy ... issuance of stamps on disarmament themes ... exhibitions of photographs, drawings and films on disarmament .... athletic or artistic events and competitions with Disarmament Week prizes.

Schools: During Disarmament Week, schools and universities could arrange lectures, class discussions, and film showings. Children could design and construct exhibits showing the cost of armaments in graphic terms.

Mock General Assembly sessions or arms-control negotiations could be organized. Oratorical, essay or poster contests are other possibilities. (UNICEF has prepared a special teacher's kit on disarmament.)

Media: The mass media could make a significant contribution to fostering aims of Disarmament Week, through special broadcasts and newspaper or magazine articles. The public could be invited to participate directly or by telephone in radio and TV discussions.

Non-Governmental Organizations: The essential role of non-governmental organizations is recognized by the Assembly. Many organizations plan special meetings and activities during Disarmament Week.

Since Disarmament Week begins on United Nations Day, events organized by UN associations and other groups to mark the Organization's anniversary can be used to stress the disarmament theme.

Topics: Meetings, discussions or lectures for Disarmament Week might deal with such topics as: the threat posed by nuclear weapons; economic and social consequences of the arms race; the relationship between disarmament and security; on-going arms control negotiations; redirection of military research and development as well as other resources to peaceful uses; disarmament and the New International Economic Order; the world arms trade; the arms race and developing countries; the scientific community and disarmament; trade unions and disarmament, etc.

-o- October 1979.